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### Class of 1985 Five Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL  
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1985  
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- \* "The legal education which I received at the University of Michigan was excellent. Keep up the good work. Thank you."
- \* "I spent the most boring three years of my life in law school at The University of Michigan. I think you ought to revise your curriculum, throw out your case books, and teach your students to think in greater depth rather than to 'massage the facts.'"
- \* "I have been very fortunate. I enjoy my work and I have a wonderful home life -- now. I am not sure that the balance existing in my life today will be as easy to maintain once I decide to have children. Unfortunately, large law firms are not very accommodating to family life."
- \* "The practice of law is great for making money, but lawyers and the law are vastly overrated and boring."

Introduction

In the spring of 1990, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 356 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1985 for whom we had at least some address. (For only nine people did we have no address.) Two hundred forty-three class members responded--a response rate of 67%, continuing the pattern of high response to the surveys that the Law School has been conducting since 1967.

Here is a report of our findings. We begin with some tables that sketch a profile of the class five years after graduation and follow with a more detailed look at class members before law school, during law school and in the settings in which they are now working. We end with the comments class members wrote in response to the last question on the survey, which asked for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever." A few examples are at the top of this page.

As you will see, five years after law school the great majority of the class is married, practicing in law firms, living prosperously but working long hours, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Many in the class have never married and some have married, divorced and remarried, many practice in settings other than law firms and many others do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1  
A Profile of the Class of 1985 in 1990  
Total respondents: 243 of 365

Family Status

Never married	33%
Married once, still married	57
Divorced	3
Remarried after divorce	4
Other	3

Children

None	64%
One	21
Two	11
Three or more	4

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	3%	} 89%
Partners in firm	5	
Associate in firm	60	
Counsel for business or financial institution	6	
Legal services, public defender	4	
Government attorney	11	
Other	1	

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Business owner or manager	3	} 11%
Law teacher	2	
Other	6	

Average Hours Worked per Week

Fewer than 40	3%	} 69%
40-44	11	
45-49	17	
50-54	28	
55-59	23	
60 +	18	

Earnings in 5th Year

(for persons not working part-time)

Up to \$35,000	8%	} 44%
\$35,100-\$45,000	13	
\$45,100-\$55,000	17	
\$55,100-\$65,000	17	
\$65,100-\$80,000	16	
\$80,100-\$100,000	16	
Over \$100,000	12	

Life Satisfaction (Very Satisfied, In Middle, Very Dissatisfied)

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>VS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>VD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	49%	43%	8%
Their current family life	66	30	5
The intellectual challenge of their work	51	45	5
Their income	51	44	5
The balance of their family and professional life	26	65	10
Their relationships with co-workers	63	34	3
Their career as a whole	46	52	3

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very liberal	26%
More liberal than conservative	27
Middle of the road	20
More conservative than liberal	21
Very conservative	6

How Class Members

<u>Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age</u>	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	15%	32%	54%
Effective as writer	2	7	91
Aggressive	28	31	42
Compulsive about work	33	24	43
Concerned about impact of their work on society	16	29	55
Honest	1	10	90
Concerned about making a lot of money	51	31	18
Compassionate	9	18	73
Self-confident	12	26	62

\*Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as indicating person to be "very satisfied," and categories 6 and 7 as "very dissatisfied."

\*\*Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1,2 and 3 as indicating person to be "less than most" and 5, 6 and 7 as "more than most."

Backgrounds and Life Before Law School

In one important respect, the class of 1985 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were male, but 34 percent of the class were women. By contrast, in 1975 just a decade earlier, only 17 percent of the graduating class were women. Over the same period, the proportion of the class who were Black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American remained essentially steady at about 11 percent.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most class

members were businessmen or professionals. Eleven percent of fathers were attorneys. Twelve percent were blue collar workers. Forty-two percent of the mothers of classmates worked as homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 23 percent were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. Two were attorneys.

As in preceding classes for many years, a majority of the class began law school immediately after finishing their undergraduate education. There was, however, a trend during the 1970s toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. Twenty-eight percent of the class of 1985 started law school two or more years after finishing as undergraduates.

Eighty-four percent of the class had never been married at the time they began law school, and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Eleven respondents began law school with children.

### The Law School Experience

Over a quarter of the class started law school without a plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, the majority expected to enter private practice but 25 percent hoped to work in government, politics or legal services. Only two percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Eight years later, five years after graduation, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are working there, but so also are the great majority of those who had no plans or planned to work in government. Most of those who hoped to work in legal services are working either in private practice or in government. On the other hand, somewhat more people are working today in corporate counsel's offices than planned to be there.)

When they looked back from the vantage of five years out, most class members had positive feeling about their law school experience--49 percent strongly positive, a total of 75 percent more positive than negative, and only 8 percent strongly negative. Class members were most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, displaying somewhat more skepticism about the law school as career training. (Sixty-seven percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 40 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as career training.) Only one-third were strongly positive about the social aspects of law school.

When asked for advice about areas of the curriculum that ought to be expanded, class members far more frequently listed areas of skills training than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase offerings in legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques and interviewing were each more

common than recommendations for any substantive subject. (The most commonly mentioned substantive subject was Corporations.)

### Life Since Law School

#### The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the class five years after graduation. Class members are geographically dispersed, work in towns of all sizes, and, though a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of this diversity is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is some more detail.

About 55 percent of the class took a first job after law school (and after any clerkship) with a law firm of 50 or more lawyers. Of this group, 69 percent still work in a large firm, 15 percent work in smaller firms, 7 percent work in a corporate counsel's office, 6 percent work in government and 5 percent have left the practice of law altogether.

About 38 percent of the class as a whole are still in the same job they took immediately after graduation. On the other hand, 24 percent of the class have held at least three jobs. (One person has held 7 jobs.) Five years after law school, almost two-thirds of the class had been in their current job for three or more years.

What kinds of jobs did people hold five years after graduation? As Table 1 above reports, 90 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. Of those who did not regard themselves as practicing law, several were business owners, managers, or executives, several more were teachers (almost all in law school), and the rest were scattered across an enormous range of occupation. The diversity of the nonpractitioners makes it nearly impossible to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible nonetheless: the nonpractitioners were, in general, as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

Another generalization about the class of 1985 can be made: prior to 1980, a much higher proportion of women than men worked in settings other than private practice (such as government, corporate counsel's offices, and law teaching). While this is still true, the gap is rapidly narrowing. The proportion of both men and women in private practice is increasing, but the rate of increase among women is much greater.

#### The Practitioners

Of those who were practicing law, two-thirds were in private practice. Most of the remainder practiced in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only ten persons were working in legal services, for a public defender or for what they

characterized as a "public interest" firm. In order to permit some generalizations about the relatively smaller numbers of persons working in settings other than private firms, we have combined the results of our surveys for the classes of 1984 and 1985. The class of 1984 was surveyed in 1989 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1985.

Ten percent of the combined classes--47 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, about two-thirds worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. Many government attorneys specialized in administrative agency work in fields such as labor, environmental law or securities.

Eight percent of the combined classes--37 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. About half this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 14 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 35 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Three percent of the combined classes--16 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Slightly over half of this group worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients. Seven persons worked for public interest firms.

Table 2 provides some comparisons of these three groups with those working in private firms. Given the differences among the groups in the types of work they do, not many relevant comparisons suggest themselves. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, those practicing in settings other than private firms worked long

Table 2  
Members of the Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Setting of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=47	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=16	<u>Private Practice</u> N=317	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=37
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	36%	57%	25%	22%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	12%	13%	5%	5%
Average work hours per week	48	51	53	49
Proportion who regularly avg. 60+ hour work week	11%	13%	25%	3%
Earnings in 5th year (average)	\$45,800	\$29,200	\$71,200	\$64,700
Total pro bono hours per year (avg.)	9	71	70	19

hours, comparable to the hours worked by the private practitioners, but earned less money. (In fact, those working in legal services setting averaged about 40 percent as much as those in private firms.)

How satisfied were the different groups with their careers? Class members were asked about several areas of satisfaction on a seven-point scale. Table 3 sets forth the proportions of the various subgroups who were very satisfied with each of four aspects of their careers and with their careers overall. We counted persons as "very satisfied" if they rated themselves as a 1 or 2 on the scale. (As the "Profile" table above indicates, very few persons recorded themselves as very dissatisfied--a rating of 6 or 7--on any dimension of their careers. Most persons who did not rate themselves as very satisfied as to any aspect of their career put themselves somewhere in the middle.)

Table 3  
Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=47	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=16	<u>Private Practice</u> N=317	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=37
Proportion of group who are quite <u>satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of their private life and professional life	43%	19%	23%	51%
The intellectual challenge of their work	59	88	48	49
Their relations with co-workers	61	81	60	67
Their current income	15	19	67	53
The value of their work to society	61	94	14	16
Their careers overall	62	56	39	38
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 yrs.	34%	63%	63%	42%

\*That is, circling categories 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale.

As table 3 indicates, there are some substantial differences in satisfaction among the groups of practitioners. Those in private firms tended to be quite satisfied with their relations with co-workers and their current incomes but less satisfied with other aspects of their lives--and particularly less satisfied with the balance of their private lives and their professional lives and with the value of their work to society. More of those in corporate counsel's offices were contented with the balance of



their family and professional lives, but, like the private practitioners, fewer than 40 percent were at this point quite satisfied with their careers as a whole. (Career satisfaction may well improve over time. When the classes of 1974 and 1975 were surveyed 15 years out of law school, 51 percent of the private practitioners and 56 percent of the corporate counsel reported themselves quite satisfied with their careers overall.)

Those working in legal services, small in number, and government were most satisfied with the value of their work to society and with their careers overall.

#### Class Members in Private Practice

Two-thirds of the classes of 1984 and 1985 are in private practice, but the settings in which they work vary greatly. We can convey some of this diversity by dividing the class into groups by the size of the firm in which class members worked.

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the firm practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice or in firms of up to 10 lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 150 lawyers and those in firms of over 150 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There were no natural dividing lines between small and medium or medium and large firms. Some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than they do the practices of most other firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor or Colorado Springs would probably be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, in very broad ways, firm size is revealing.

Table 4  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Size of Firm

<u>Persons working:</u>	<u>N=</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Solo or in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers	37	12%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	65	21
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	61	19
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	153	48

As table 4 displays, when we do divide the private practitioners into these groups, we find that a substantial number worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size (though many fewer of the Michigan lawyers work in solo practice or small firms than is the case among lawyers nationally). However, the trend towards large firm jobs for Michigan graduates is becoming more and more apparent. The average number of other lawyers with whom the graduates of the classes of 1984 and 1985 work is 207, up substantially from the numbers reported by five-year alumni

even in the classes of the late 1970s. Nearly half of the combined classes in private practice now work for firms with more than 150 lawyers, and the average size of these very large firms is 374.

Table 5  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=37	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=65	<u>Firms of 51-150</u> N=61	<u>Firms of more than 150</u> N=153
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	4	31	100	374
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	14%	21%	24%	29%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	10%	3%	4%	5%
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	46%	7%	5%	5%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	35%	53%	75%	78%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	34%	7%	4%	2%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	16%	51%	64%	71%

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings and types of clients of the persons working in firms of the various sizes. As the table reveals, members of the classes of 1984 and 1985 who worked in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers often worked in small cities and spent a considerable portion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the middle size and large firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in very large cities and to spend their time primarily serving large businesses.

Although the nature of their practices differed greatly, in many ways the work habits of the lawyers in the various sizes of firms were much the same. As table 6 reveals, they all tended, as groups, to work long hours, although the same could be said for most of the government attorneys, legal services attorneys and corporate counsel in the survey.

Table 6  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=37	Firms of 11-50 N=65	Firms of 51-150 N=61	Firms of more than 150 N=153
Average number of hours worked each week*	48	51	53	54
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	11%	19%	25%	31%
Total hours per year working on a pro bono/ no fee basis (avg.)**	67	66	70	72
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$107	\$116	\$126	\$149
Income from practice in fifth year (avg.)	\$55,100	\$57,300	\$66,700	\$82,700
Proportion who earned \$45,000 or less	50%	19%	5%	1%
Proportion who earned over \$75,000	18%	9%	21%	51%

\*Instructions were to count all work whether billable or nonbillable.

\*\*Question asked for percent of time working "no fee/pro bono (count explicit initial agreements only)".

Despite these similar efforts as measured by time, the economics of practice varied greatly by firm size. In general, as table 6 displays, the smaller the setting in which class members worked the less they typically charged for their time and the less they typically earned (though all, as groups, prospered by any American standard). Those in the largest firms averaged about 50 percent more than those in the small firms. Attorneys in firms of all sizes averaged about 70 hours of unpaid pro bono work per year, typically giving many more hours of pro bono time than their classmates working in corporate counsel's offices.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. People in the smallest firms or solo practice were more frequently satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives and most, in firms of all sizes, were well satisfied with their relationships with co-workers. Not surprisingly, those working in the largest firms included the highest proportion who were well satisfied with their incomes. Distressingly few in firms of all ranges were well satisfied with the value of their work to society.

Table 7  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1984 and 1985  
Five Years After Graduation  
Satisfaction with Career

	Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=37	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=65	Firms of <u>51-150</u> N=61	Firms of more than <u>150</u> N=153
Proportion who are <u>very satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	43%	29%	20%	16%
The intellectual challenge of work	54	52	53	43
Their relations with co-workers	65	57	62	59
Their current income	35	53	60	83
The value of their work to society	27	16	12	11
Their careers overall	43	39	37	38
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	65%	65%	66%	61%

\*That is, circling categories 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale.